DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 328 835 CG 023 141

TITLE	The Early Identification and Treatment of At-Risk Youth. Interim Report of the Secretary of Education to the Governor and the General Assembly of Virginia. House Document No. 18.
INSTITUTION	Virginia State Dept. of Education, Richmond.
REPORT NO	18
PUB DATE	90
NOTE	13p.
PUB TYPE	Reports - Evaluative/Feasibility (142) -- Legal/Legislative/Regulatory Materials (090)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Attendance; Behavior Problems; *Dropout Characteristics; *Dropouts; *Educational Needs; *Educational Policy; *High Risk Students; Program Evaluation; School Holding Power; School Role; Secondary Education; *State Programs; State Standards; Statewide Planning; Student School Relationship; Truancy

ABSTRACT

Pursuant to Virginia's House Joint Resolution No. 415, calling for the identification and treatment of truants, dropouts, and youths at risk, this interim report provides a background and framework for policies and guidelines in this area, particularly as they relate to dropping out. It then reviews existing or new programs which address related needs and concerns, and cites current issues such as in-school behavioral management needs and the new age-18 attendance requirement. Thereafter, it provides recommendations for data collection and the development of policy guidelines and provides a timetable for completion of this work. (Author/TE)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED328835

CG

INTERIM REPORT OF THE
SECRETARY OF EDUCATION

The Early Identification and Treatment of At-Risk Youth

TO THE GOVERNOR AND
THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF VIRGINIA

HOUSE DOCUMENT NO. 18

COMMONWEALTH OF VIRGINIA
RICHMOND
1990

C60231141

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

H. L. Smith

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Letter of Transmittal i

I. BACKGROUND 1

II. INTRODUCTION 2

Standards of Quality 2

Children in Need of Services (CHINS) 2

III. CURRENT ISSUES 5

IV. RECOMMENDATIONS. 7

A. *Phase One (Data Collection)* 7

B. *Phase Two (Development of Policy Guidelines)* 8

V. SUMMARY. 9

LETTER OF TRANSMITTAL

To the Members of the General Assembly of Virginia:

House Joint Resolution No. 415 requests the promulgation of specific policies and guidelines that provide for the early identification and treatment of such truants, dropouts, and youths at-risk.

Students who are habitually absent, especially elementary aged students, are those who are sending unmistakable signals of alienation to teachers, principals, and parents alike. Left unmonitored and unchecked these youngsters will eventually drop out altogether. Many engage in maladaptive or self-destructive behaviors. Available instruction and counseling must be better coordinated so that those students are identified early on and support is provided immediately.

This interim report: provides a background and framework for policies and guidelines in this area, particularly as they relate to dropping out; reviews existing or new programs which address related needs and concerns; cites current issues such as in-school behavioral management needs, and the new age-18 attendance requirement; requests data collection and the development of policy guidelines; and provides a timetable for completion of the work.

The collection of school data across localities will yield valuable information on effective policies and programs on truancy and absenteeism. Further, a task force will be assembled to develop and recommend policies and guidelines that may be used by individual schools and state policy makers to effect needed modifications and alternatives.

Virginia and the nation as a whole have an enormous stake in ensuring that every young person obtains a good education and gets off to a strong start in the job market. By 1995 only 18 percent of the working-age population will be 16 to 24 years old, compared with 27 percent in 1978. As our population grows older and the proportion of Americans who are young adults shrinks, we will need every young adult to be working at the best of his or her ability in order to build the base that can sustain economic growth.

Thanks to you, the Commonwealth has already embarked on a course to reduce disparities as well as the numbers of citizens who never make it to our workforce, those who become lost to our future. That is the agenda for the 1990s. We look forward to reporting our results in April, 1990.

With kindest regards,

Donald J. Finley
Secretary of Education

I. BACKGROUND - House Joint Resolution No. 415

House Joint Resolution No. 415 requests that ***"The Secretary of Education promulgate specific policies and guidelines to provide for early identification and treatment of truants, dropouts and at-risk youth in school divisions across the Commonwealth. Such policy development shall include consideration of use of in-school resources, including individual and family counseling, special education and alternative education, instructional and classroom modifications, teacher consultation, administrative and behavior management, and health services."***

The charge of HJR 415 compares favorably to state and national concerns about the plight of children who are at decided risk, particularly due to inadequate achievement and low self esteem. Policies should be developed from a position of supportive intervention rather than one of punishment. Thus, HJR 415 is of utmost importance to the overall movement to eliminate disparities, reduce the number of school dropouts, and to provide sound educational opportunities for all of Virginia's students.

II. INTRODUCTION

The early identification of at-risk children has become a major issue in understanding the nature of the dropout problem. Many researchers and educators believe that those who will eventually drop out can be identified as early as the second or third grade.

Dropping out of school is not an isolated event. It does not occur spontaneously nor does it happen without warning. Rather, it usually represents the culmination of many interwoven and complex social, economic, health, and educational needs that have not been appropriately identified nor adequately addressed.

Included among the surest of indicators, however, are truancy and absenteeism. Youngsters who elect not to come to school are children who are not only beginning to experience academic failure on a regular basis, they are also children who are sending the strongest and earliest message that achievement and graduation are not likely or even desirable outcomes.

The direct correlation between early childhood success among at-risk children, and increased high school graduation rates is one that is also key to recent efforts by Virginia's Board of Education and the legislature to identify and provide additional resources for these youngsters and their families.

Standards of Quality

Elementary guidance counseling, smaller class sizes, literacy testing, family life education, dropout prevention, and remedial programs are among Board of Education initiatives which seek to assist young students, their families, and their schools in responding to these needs. The Board's actions were

timely because the General Assembly's Joint Subcommittee Studying School Dropouts (1989) had also concluded that over 50 percent of school dropouts had previously been chronic truants.

Children in Need of Services (CHINS)
Youth Experiencing Success (Project Y.E.S.)

The Joint Subcommittee Studying Children in Need of Services (CHINS) (1987-89) discerned from its own work and that of the dropout subcommittee that there was a critical need for the development, implementation, coordination, and application of resources on behalf of truants.

Moreover, during the 1989 legislative session the General Assembly agreed to fund Project Y.E.S. (Youth Experiencing Success), a $6.9 million grant program awarded to school divisions to develop dropout intervention and prevention programs. Sixty-eight school divisions have been awarded funds which require that, among other criteria, will target the achievement, attendance, and behavioral needs of youngsters not later than the middle-school years. Most localities are using their funds to significantly reduce truant behaviors among their at-risk elementary and middle school-age populations.

Moreover, the "CHINS" subcommittee conducted a survey of seven selected Virginia communities and concluded that the Commonwealth's schools "have no consistent statewide policy for intervention with truants . . .." Although individual communities had implemented innovative attendance programs, others provided few if any services whatsoever. The CHINS survey also reflected an absence of an effective interagency approach in coordinating a delivery of services to at-risk populations. Court services units were not "talking with" schools who were not "talking with" social services, who were

not "talking with" health agencies, etc.. Authority, therefore, was needed to encourage coordination among state and local agencies so that the needs of these youngsters would be served in a comprehensive manner. Improved school attendance and a significant decrease in the dropout rate would be a direct benefit and the optimal outcome.

Add to those the matter of enforcement of existing attendance laws. The Code of Virginia (§ 22.1-254 and 22.1-258) empowers local school boards to enforce school attendance through the appointment of attendance officers. However, data on the effectiveness, even the number of such persons, are inconsistently collected and analyzed. The mission of the Visiting Teacher, a position first authorized by the 1945 General Assembly to help enforce attendance, should also be reviewed.

Aside from the laws on compulsory attendance, there are no statewide policies regarding intervention on behalf of children who are habitually absent or are truant. Further, data from local school divisions are sketchy at best on the incidence and patterns of absenteeism and truancy, and worse still on practices typically being utilized to correct or modify the behavior(s). Indeed, it may well be that some attendance policies actually contribute to absenteeism rather than deter it. For example, some school divisions require that a child's grade be lowered (including "F") should he or she exceed the acceptable number of unexcused absences. Others suspend students from attendance when they are truant from school. Individual schools often communicate unspoken but unmistakable signals of "not welcome" to students who are frequently absent or who demonstrate maladaptive behaviors when they attend.

III. CURRENT ISSUES

If successful, new policies, guidelines, or procedures will return truant youngsters to the school on a regular basis, and will prevent discouraged potential truants from absenting themselves in the first place.

However, if such policies are to be effective over the duration, they must provide teachers and principals--those at the school site--with flexible and creative classroom and program management options.

Frequently, youngsters who wish to absent themselves from school or drop out altogether, will "act out" in order to be administratively removed. Suspensions and expulsions are the usual outcomes. Most of these youngsters return to school often enough to act out and be removed again. Over time, however, they frequently develop unsavory "reputations" among peers and faculty alike. Many are feared.

These youngsters often become "pushouts". They are frequently disruptive students whose suspensions from school become more frequent, with less delay between incidents, and for longer intervals once suspended. The youngster "gets what he wants"--to get out. The school gets what it perceives it needs--a measure of relief and decreased threat to its authority.

New or improved procedures must provide teachers and principals with sufficient empowerment or authority to create constructive and productive instructional alternatives for the potential pushout while he is in attendance. Policies which fail to address this issue are likely to fail.

Second, it is important to monitor the impact of the new CHINS legislation which became effective on July 1, 1989. Definitions are now in place for children in need of services and/or supervision. Given the recency of this legislation, school divisions have just begun the process of modifying and improving their truancy and dropout policies and procedures.

Third, the federal Family Support Act of 1988 will provide continuing payments to disadvantaged individuals who need basic and remedial education and job training. The Act includes specific guidelines for returning students to school, to sites for vocational training programs, or to actual employment. New policies and guidelines should complement or supplement, but not conflict with, this legislation.

From stateside, on July 1, 1990 the compulsory school attendance law will increase the upper age limit on attendance from 17 to 18. This new law also requires the exploration of and provision for various alternative education programs and resources. The onset of this statute presents a major boost for localities seeking flexibility and programmatic options. Students who previously became bored with existing course offerings or who were failing the academic demands, will now have expanded alternatives in the fields of vocational and apprenticeship training. This initiative, together with the impact of the Project Y.E.S. dropout grants, could yield immediate, perhaps dramatic improvements in attendance behaviors across the Commonwealth.

IV. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the need for collecting data, for information resulting from various legislative and Virginia Department of Education studies, and the goal of identifying and collecting exemplary practices elsewhere, a two-phased strategy is recommended to prepare a final HJR 415 report for Spring, 1990.

A. *Phase One (Data Collection)*

Department of Education staff, local school division administrators, visiting teachers/school social workers, and dropout prevention coordinators will assist in the design and implementation of a comprehensive data collection and analysis process which will encompass the following:

- Demographic descriptions of school divisions and numerical data on truancy and absenteeism, including patterns and frequencies of occurrence will be requested of all school divisions in the Commonwealth;
- A comprehensive review of current policies and practices pertaining to truancy and absenteeism in all local school divisions;
- A comprehensive review of policies and practices used by other youth-serving agencies such as the courts, social services, and corrections; and
- An identification of model programs to assist students by preventing absenteeism and truancy.

B. *Phase Two (Development of Policy Guidelines)*

A task force will be appointed to include representation from the legislature, courts, youth services, social services, court services units, local school divisions and the Department of Education. The task force will:

- Review the compilation of data and studies regarding at-risk students;
- Review the current status of Virginia's policies and practices regarding truancy and absenteeism; and
- Develop guidelines for policy and practices at the state and local levels which address the charge of HJR 415 and which include *"in-school resources, including individual and family counseling, special education and alternative education, instructional and classroom modifications, teacher consultation, administrative and behavior management, and health services."*

The guidelines will address the early identification of absenteeism, intervention and assistance for children who are chronically or habitually absent from school; the use of other resources including pupil personnel services in the prevention of truancy and absenteeism; and school collaboration with the courts and other youth-serving agencies in managing and treating truancy and absenteeism.

V. SUMMARY

HJR 415 requested Cabinet-level assistance in the promulgation of policies and guidelines to assist local school divisions in properly serving children who are habitually absent from school. The charge further directed the exploration of a number of resources and alternatives which would provide for effective interventions with students.

The guidelines resulting from this charge should reflect the insights of pupil personnel services professionals (visiting teachers/school social workers, counselors, school psychologists, and school nurses, etc.) that absenteeism and truancy are symptoms of deeper problems and should be approached from a supportive intervention perspective, one that also includes family members.

The study and resulting document will be the primary responsibility of the Office of the Secretary of Education with concurrent management and coordination responsibilities on the part of the Department of Education. A final report will be submitted on or before April 1, 1990.

Interim target dates are as follow:

- December 15, 1989: Completion of data collection
  Appointment of Task Force
- March 1, 1990: Completion of recommended policies and guidelines.